

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 9 June 2014

At 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present:

Councillor Mrs J C Baker (Chairman)

Councillors: A K Beames C Holliday
 Ms M J C Curry J S King
 R F N Curry T J Morris
 A D Harvey

Officers: Town Clerk Democratic Services Officer

F248 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence,

F249 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr M J C Curry declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 10 relating to the Town Hall rent as she was a trustee for the Town Hall Charity.

Cllr King declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 13 – Discretionary Grants – as there was an application from the Rotary Club and he was a member of the Witney Educational Foundation which had given the Rotary Club a grant.

Cllr Baker declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 10 as the agent is a family member.

F250 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Cllr King proposed Cllr Harvey, seconded by Cllr Harvey. Cllr Holliday proposed Cllr Morris, seconded by Cllr Beames. On being put to the vote 3 members voted for Cllr Harvey and 4 members voted for Cllr Morris.

RESOLVED: that Cllr T J Morris be appointed Vice Chairman of this Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

F251 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 7 March 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F252 MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman updated Members on the situation relating to the Teen zone at Madley Park. The Town Clerk advised that a full report would be going to the Amenities Committee.

F253 **COMMITTEE VISION**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda.

She felt that a review of the Standing Orders, Corporate Governance Policies, and Financial Regulations was due in light of new legislation, and asked if members had any objectives or items for future agendas.

Cllr R Curry thought that the Committee needed to agree a three year budget and also the format of budgets and reports so that members could understand the information presented.

The Town Clerk commented that this was why a Finance/Budget Working Party had been set up. She had spoken to Mr Kemp of DCK Beavers and he did not recommend manipulating data manually from the Finance Programme as there could be errors made in manual transposition. There was an opportunity for the Council to purchase additional software which could create reports from the existing system.

Cllr Harvey suggested that a meeting of the Working Party was held with the Town Clerk in attendance so that she could explain the issues with the current system. The Town Clerk said that Mr Kemp would be attending the Council meeting on 23 June to present the annual return and proposed that a meeting was held before the Council meeting.

RECOMMENDED: that a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Party be held before the Council meeting on 23 June 2014 with Mr Kemp in attendance.

F254 **REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S MISSION STATEMENT AND COPORATE OBJECTIVES**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda. Cllr Morris wondered if the Council's mission statement was a little ambitious at present in terms of seeking "continuous improvement in the range [...] of services provided by Witney Town Council". He felt that the Council should concentrate on bringing existing services up to scratch. Cllr Harvey commented that it was a Mission Statement and not a promise!

The Chairman considered the corporate objectives were a bit outdated. Cllrs King and R Curry thought they were appropriate

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

F255 **PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE REVIEWS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda. She explained the background to the Corporate Performance Plan and Performance/Service Reviews. Within the Corporate Performance Plan she highlighted the last review cycle. The Town Clerk said that if the Committee was happy with this methodology she suggested the Members should prioritise functions and services to review with a view to saving the £100,000 deficiency over the next 3 years as identified during the budget cycle.

Cllr Harvey gave the background to his previous involvement in Best Value Reviews at both the Town Council and WODC. Whilst the process could sometimes be exasperating, it did ensure that members really looked at what the Council was doing. He felt the Council would benefit from a Corporate Performance Plan and was happy to put himself forward to be involved in this.

The Chairman said this would only be useful if it was used and followed through. Unless the Plan was revisited regularly and followed through it would be a waste of time for everybody. The Plan needed to have depth to it.

Cllr R Curry stated that he would be reluctant to employ an outside consultant. In his opinion the Plan was something the Committees should be doing and reporting back to the Policy and Finance Committee. The Chairman thought it would be good to have a Working Party for this. Cllr R Curry commented that if there was a Working Party then it could ask the Committees questions and report back to the Policy and Finance Committee.

Cllr Harvey said that the Policy and Finance Committee had set the matrix of saving £100,000; the Chairmen of each Committee had to look at how to save money. They could perhaps have sessions with officers and ask them questions.

The Town Clerk commented that to consider the performance reviews in Committee would make for a long meeting. Furthermore she envisaged there would be resource issues if all the Committees reviewed its areas of responsibility at the same time. This was why the P&F Committee was being asked to prioritise areas of the Council's business. Cllr R Curry felt that the Finance and Budget Working Party could take this on. He wanted to know what others wanted from a Best Value Review.

Cllr R Curry commented that it was a chicken and egg situation. He thought the Council needed to see where cuts could be made and then consult with people. Cllr Harvey responded that people would never be supportive of cuts. Cllr M J C Curry agreed with the Town Clerk that members needed to understand what was happening on the ground.

Cllr Beames referred to page 30 of the existing Corporate Performance Plan. He felt that a service review could feed into a finance plan which could feed into a 3 year plan, to see what could be done with the money available and what needed cutting. Cllr Harvey proposed that the Committee looked at the Town Clerk's recommendations. He thought they were cogent and that a Working Party could be formed.

Cllr Morris agreed with this, but thought that the Committees could be asked to look at what they felt was important, what it was "nice to have" and where cuts could be made. Cllr M J C Curry felt that prioritisations needed to be discussed with the relevant lead officers. Cllr King thought this had already been done via the Committee's vision statements.

Cllr R Curry was not in favour of a new Plan. He did not want another consultant employed and he asked if officers could produce a document for consideration. The Chairman said there was no question of employing another consultant. Cllr R Curry felt the key was to ask if the Council could provide the same (or better) services for less money.

The Chairman was concerned about the creation of another Working Party, and thought the remit of the Finance and Budget Working Party could be widened to include this. Cllr M J C Curry agreed as it dovetailed nicely.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. that the report be noted.
2. that the Service and Performance Reviews be utilised using the Best Value Principles to scrutinise the Council's functions in order to try and achieve the savings required in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
3. that the Council's services and functions be prioritised to formulate a work programme of service reviews, starting with the Statutory Objectives.
4. that the remit of the Finance and Budget Working Party be extended to include the Performance and Service reviews. The first meeting would be held before Council on 23 June 2014.

F256 **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk and the Annual Investment Strategy as circulated with the agenda. She pointed out that she had amended the Annual Investment Strategy to include the CCLA investment.

Cllr R Curry asked how much of the current account money was actually needed. The Town Clerk replied that the Corn Exchange would need money and therefore the Council could not tie too much long term.

Cllr Morris recalled that the Council had wanted instant access to its money. If anything was to change, he thought that more should be invested with the CCLA as it offered higher interest and instant access. Members agreed with this.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted
2. that the current investment in secure banks be approved and that the Town Clerk continues to monitor interest rates to ensure that the Council received the most advantageous interest rates, and looks to invest further funds with the CCLA.
3. that the Annual Investment Strategy 2014/15 as circulated be formally approved by the Committee.

F257 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda.

The Town Clerk brought to Members attention the Mayor's Chain which needed some attention. The Chairman said she was loathed to spend money on it but currently it was almost impossible for her to wear. There were loose links and broken links and there was only one space left for inscriptions which would be filled by last year's Mayor, Cllr Dorward.

Cllr Morris commented that he didn't like the idea of past mayor's being removed from the chain to make space for the future. Cllr R Curry pointed out that at some point there would be too many past Mayors for the chain. Cllr M J C Curry suggested archiving the outer section of the chain. Cllr Harvey proposed that this could be displayed in a purpose built display frame in the Council chamber.

Cllr Harvey commented that it was the Town Council's only piece of regalia. Cllr R Curry proposed extending the inner chain by 8 links and to add a velvet backing. Cllr M J C Curry proposed that a display case for the outer chain should be sourced.

The Chairman requested that the board displaying past Mayors was brought up to date. The Town Clerk explained that the sign writer had died but she now had a contact to approach.

The Committee considered the correspondence from the Council's agent in respect of the rent of the Town Hall. The Town Hall Charity had agreed that it should stay the same given the extensive works undertaken recently. Cllr Harvey thought that perhaps an alternative view on the rent should be sought, although this might be a waste of time as an increase had not been suggested.

Cllr R Curry commented that a lower rent had been suggested by the same agent for the Council owned cemetery lodge as rental yields had fallen. He felt it would therefore be reasonable to ask for a decrease in rent for the Town Hall. Cllr Morris didn't think it would be worth getting another agent's opinions but he liked Cllr R Curry's suggestion of asking for a decrease in rent. Cllr R Curry stated that he was happy to pay the rent but he thought the question should be asked. Cllr Beames thought the rent should be accepted but it should be checked that there was not an upward only review clause in the lease.

The Town Clerk pointed out that the Town Council received an income from the shops below the Town Hall. She added that originally there had been a suggestion that the Town Hall's rent should increase and thus there was probably an upward only clause in the lease.

The Town Clerk highlighted the fact that with the sale of the Langdale Hall pending, the Council would lose its archive space which was currently located in the top floor flat. She suggested that Officers should research the options and bring back a report to a future meeting – including transferring information onto electronic records. As a temporary measure Cllr Harvey suggested there may be space at the WODC Depot, as it had been used for storage when Elmfield was refurbished.

The Committee considered the Council's agents correspondence relating to the lease of the Cemetery Lodge to the Co-Op, recommending a new 5 year lease and a rent reduction. Cllr R Curry asked why the lease had not been renegotiated in 2010. The Town Clerk advised that the Co-Op had not wanted to renew at that stage and that they had not been obliged to, so the terms of the lease were held over.

In response to Cllr R Curry's question the Town Clerk confirmed that she had been working on a property terrier ensuring that all the Council's land was registered at Land Registry and subsequently a database was nearly complete with details of the Council's property portfolio and information pertaining to the leases.

The Town Clerk unfortunately had to report some bad debts as at the financial year end 2013/14, but she pointed out that this was a rare occurrence. The debtors who had used

the Council's halls no longer did so. The debts were old debts from 2010 – 2012, and she said it was possible that they had been paid at the time as this was when a new Halls Booking System was being introduced. However the majority of the bad debts related to Evergreen PV who had gone into voluntary liquidation.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted.
2. that the recommendation on Tennis in the Park from the Recreation Committee be agreed.
2. that work is carried out on the Mayoral Chain to extend it by 8 links with a velvet backing, and that a display case be sourced for the outer chain which would be archived.
4. that the rent for the Town Hall is accepted and that the lease is checked to see if there is an upward only clause. *Cllr M J C Curry abstained from voting for this recommendation as she was a trustee of the Town Hall Charity.*
5. that the transferring of Council's records to an electronic format is investigated.
6. that the recommendation from the Council's agent relating to Cemetery Lodge is agreed.

F258 **NOTICE OF ANNUAL AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2014**

The Committee received and considered the notice of the annual audit of accounts.

RECOMMENDED: that the notice of the annual audit be noted.

F259 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received and considered the schedule of the accounts paid from 1 March 2014 to 30 April 2014.

Cllr R Curry noted that £3,000 had been spent on risk assessment training and a health and safety audit and asked if this was an annual occurrence. The Town Clerk said that it was and something that needed to be done as agreed during the staffing review in 2012.

The Town Clerk explained that the payment of £12,000 to the bowls club was the interest free loan agreed by the Council earlier in the year.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the following schedule of accounts be approved:

Cheques 28959 – 29006 & DD/BACS in the sum of	£63, 397.09	Imprest a/c
Cheques 100945/49 DD & standing orders in the sum of	£103,932.80	General a/c

Cheques 29002 / 2980-& DD/BACS in the sum of	£77,923.56	General a/c
Cheques 28901/958 DD/BACS & standing orders in the sum of	£74,202.49	Imprest a/c

2. that the bank reconciliations as at 31 March 2014 and 30 April 2014 be noted.

F260 **DISCRETIONARY GRANT APPLICATIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Democratic Services Officer as circulated with the agenda. The budget for 2014/15 was £3,560. Witney Town Band received an annual grant of £500 and the Carnival had previously been granted an additional £100 towards the provision of public conveniences. Witney Community Awareness Day had submitted a grant application but as the event was before the next Council meeting it had been agreed by the Chairman of the Policy and Finance Committee and Councillors outside of the meeting to award the sum of £250. This left a balance of £2,710 for the year.

The subsidised lettings budget for 2014/15 was £1,800.

a) Lunchtime Recitals

Members felt these were very popular concerts.

b) Travelling Light Productions

The Committee noted that the group was asking for free hall use, but it was very unclear as to how much time/how many sessions they were asking for. Cllr M J C Curry was unhappy about this application as there were – contrary to the applicants claims – other local amateur dramatics pantomimes.

Cllr Harvey was not happy that the grant would enable the group to raise money for charity, which was effectively asking the Council for a donation to a charity of the groups choice. The Town Clerk pointed out that the Town Council was not permitted to give money to third world charities, which was where some of the money raised would be donated.

Cllr Morris said that in the groups budget, it did not show any money going to charity.

c) The Rotary Club of Witney

Cllr Harvey thought that the publication on Witney Blankets had been done before. He did not have a problem with this but wanted the Town Council's badge to appear on the booklets.

Cllr King added that the club had also applied to the Witney Educational Foundation and the Town Hall Charity.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that the report be noted.
- 2) that the following grants be awarded:

<u>Applicant</u>	<u>Grant</u>
a) Lunchtime Recitals	£250.00
b) Travelling Light Productions	Declined
c) The Rotary Club of Witney	£150.00

- 3) that payments of the above grants be made under the following powers:
- a. **Local Government Act 1972. s145** – Provision of Entertainments
 - b. **Local Government Act 1972. S137** – Power of local authorities to incur expenditure for certain purpose not otherwise authorised
- 4) that a press release be issued advising of grant support given by the Town Council.

F261 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Committee agreed to the exclusion of the press and public in order to discuss staffing matters.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

The Committee adjourned the meeting at 7.36pm for a meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee and subsequently came out of confidential session and continued at 8.10pm.

F262 **STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee received and considered the Personnel Sub Committee minutes of 7 May 2014 and a verbal report from the meeting held that evening.

RECOMMENDED: that the minutes and the recommendations contained therein be agreed.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm

Chairman

